

Memorandum on the Elephant Statues in the Delhi Palace.—By
Col. J. ABBOTT.

[Received 2nd December, 1863.]

In the last number of the Society's Journal, No. III. of 1863, I have read with interest General Cunningham's remarks upon the life size statues found in the Royal citadel at Delhi.

As I happened to be at Delhi when these statues were disinterred, I had opportunity of examining them and at once recognised the long sought statues, mentioned by Bernier in these words.

“The entrance of the fortress presents nothing remarkable besides two large elephants of stone placed at either side of one of the principal gates. On one of the elephants is seated the statue of Jemel (meaning no doubt Jye Mul) the renowned Raja of Chitore. On the other is that of his brother Polta (Putta). These are the brave heroes who, with their still braver mother, immortalised their names by the extraordinary resistance which they opposed to the celebrated Acbar; defending the towns besieged by that great emperor with unshaken resolution and being at length reduced to extremity, devoted themselves to their country, and chose rather to perish with their mother in sallies against the enemy, than submit to an insolent invader. It is owing to this extraordinary devotion on their part, that their enemies have thought them deserving of the statues here erected to their memory. These two large elephants, mounted by the two heroes, have an air of grandeur, and inspire me with an awe and respect which I cannot describe.”

Could I have supposed that any one visiting Delhi, would not have this account fresh in memory, I would earlier have troubled you with the reference.

Regarding Chittore, Ferishta says that when Akbar was besieging Chittore, after the failure of two assaults, the emperor was so fortunate as to shoot Jugmull, whom he had observed on the ramparts directing the defence. On which the enemy lost heart, destroyed their wives and children with fire, on a funeral pile with their slain chief, and retiring to their temples refused quarter, but were slain, (apparently without resistance,) to the number of ten thousand. This Jugmull must be the same as the Jemel of Bernier.

The Hindoo account as collected by Tod from the records and traditions of Mewar is as follows.

“But the names that shine brightest in this gloomy page of the annals of Mewar, which are still held sacred by the Bard and true Rajpootre and immortalised by Akbar’s own pen, are Jeimul of Bednore and Putta of Kailwa, both of the sixteen superior vassals of Mewar. The names of Jeimul and Putta are as household words inseparable, &c. When Saloombra fell at the gate of the Sun, the command devolved upon Putta of Kailwa. He was only sixteen years of age. His father had fallen in the last shock, and his mother had survived but to rear this the sole heir of their house. Like the Spartan mother of old, she commanded him to put on the saffron robe and to die for Chittore. But, surpassing the Grecian dame, she illustrated her precept by example, armed the young bride of her son with a lance and with her descended from Chittore; whence the defenders saw the young bride fall fighting by the side of her Amazonian mother. When wives and daughters performed such deeds, the Rajpootees became reckless of life. They had maintained a protracted defence and had no thought of surrender, when a ball struck Jeimul who had succeeded to the command.”

The northern ramparts had been entirely destroyed by the mines of Akbar. The fatal Johur or sacrifice of females was awaited, and at its close, the gates of the fortress were thrown open, the work of destruction commenced, and few survived to stain the yellow mantle by inglorious surrender. Akbar entered Chittore and slew 30,000 of his enemies. Nine queens, five princesses, their daughters, with two infant princes, and the families of all the chieftains not at their estates, perished in the fatal Johur or in the sack. The gates were taken for the emperor’s fortress at Agra.

Akbar claimed the honour of Jeimul’s death by his own hand. The conqueror of Chittore evinced the sense of the merits of his foes in erecting statues to the manes of Putta and Jeimul at the most conspicuous entrance of his palace at Delhi.

I have shortened and simplified Tod’s inflated narrative which is often sufficiently obscure.

The origin of these statues is still matter of uncertainty. Had they been made by Akbar or carried from Chittore by him, we might expect to find them rather at Agra, his chief capital, than at Delhi.

The stone of which the elephants are built is of black colour and slaty texture, greatly resembling that of which the Indo-Greek sculptures are wrought near the Indus. There is nothing of this kind at or near Delhi; nor do I think it is found at Chittore: but of this I am not certain. Being in blocks of moderate size it may have been brought from afar. The statues stood at the gate of the citadel of Delhi at the commencement of Aurungzebe's reign. When that monster's religious frenzy attained its height, they were probably pulled to pieces, in deference to the hatred of the orthodox for images of all kinds. Bernier states, *not* (as quoted by Tod), that they stood at the *principal* entrance to the citadel, but that they stood at *one* of the principal entrances. This was probably the Delhi gate of the citadel; so called as facing the original city of Delhi. They were found buried in old and in recent rubbish, inside the citadel, at a spot intermediate between the two principal gates, but nearer to the Delhi Gate.

The screens to the citadel gates were built by Aurungzebe himself, and they could not perhaps have been built without removing these statues, which at any rate would be most suitably posted outside the gate of the screen. Supposing them to have been pulled down accordingly, it is not to be supposed that the saintly monster would have had any share in reconstructing idols.

P. S.—In Tod's narrative we are told that there were 30,000 inhabitants in the fortress of Chittore when it opened its gates. Yet he does not say that these rushed out sword in hand upon the enemy. And from Ferishta's account we gather that they could have made little or no defence, as few if any of the assailants were slain. The spirit of manhood seems to have deserted the breasts of the males to centre in that of the women. Indeed the brutal sacrifice of the Johur whilst 30,000 of the garrison survived, or even the ten thousand reckoned by Tod, denotes anything but the spirit of heroes. Undoubted instances of the gallantry of Rajpootres are on record. But they seem at times to have despaired very early in the day. Certainly no army of undisciplined troops could have taken Chittore if manfully defended by ten thousand men.